DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 936 JC 970 099

TITLE	Danville Area Community College, Exploring America's Communities. Progress Report.
INSTITUTION	Danville Area Community Coll., IL.
SPONS AGENCY	American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, DC.; National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Jan 97
NOTE	7p.; In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book (New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997); see JC 970 087.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Colleges; *Cultural Pluralism; Curriculum Development; *Discussion; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Interviews; Literature; *Multicultural Education; Program Descriptions; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	Danville Area Community College IL

ABSTRACT

In 1996, Illinois' Danville Area Community College (DACC) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the instruction of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. DACC's action plan involved students in collecting materials from members of African American, Latino, and Asian communities in the Danville area, to be used for curriculum development in DACC's humanities classes and to be available to the local community. The students prepared for their interviews by discussing diversity and studying oral history research methodology. The interviews provided information about work patterns among minorities and the important roles played by education and military service in their survival. Common themes and challenges such as language barriers, isolation, and job discrimination were uncovered. Pride in accomplishments, a firm belief in family, and identification with family were common to all groups. The greatest challenge was to find people who were willing to be interviewed. To show their gratitude to the interviewees, the students and faculty held a celebration displaying pictures and quotes from the interviews. The interviewees' corrections of the manuscript are yet to be completed. Students who completed the project stated in their evaluations that they had gained a new awareness of minorities, a new appreciation for community diversity, and pride in their own abilities to meet new challenges. (HAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 403 936

Danville Area Community College
Exploring America's Communities Progress Report

In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
(New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997)

JC 970 099

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Gollattscheck

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Danville Area Community College is located in a rural/blue collar community in east central Illinois. The college was established initially as an extension center of the University of Illinois in 1946 and became a public junior college in 1949. It has been located since 1965 in several buildings constructed at the turn of the century and acquired from the Veterans Administration. Several renovations and additional buildings have been added. Enrollment is approximately 1800 FTE credit students.

Because of its diverse economy--farming, mining, and heavy industry--the Danville area attracted European immigrants from Ireland, Germany, France, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, Lithuania, and the Slavic countries. African Americans began to arrive in Danville from the Deep South after 1860, with heaviest immigration in the twentieth century, and African Americans now comprise 12 per cent of the population. Latinos, most of them migrant workers to Vermilion County fields and canning factories, have arrived in increasing numbers since the 1950s. Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, Hmong, and peoples from the Indian subcontinent have added to the diversity of the population in the last two decades. Therefore, the Danville community still consists of a European American majority, but ethnic and racial diversity are an important part of its composition.

Danville is a typical rust belt community which has lost much of its heavy industry during the past two decades, but which

is trying to restructure its economy and prepare its work force for new technological opportunities. Through the last decades of population decline and unemployment, the community has looked more frequently towards Danville Community College for leadership in these efforts. The college has responded through a "Workforce 2000" initiative with local business and public schools for improved student preparation and through its well-regarded leadership in human relations and the humanities. The college has led community discussions through Jefferson Meetings on constitutional issues and through World Affairs Council symposia, and college faculty are frequent speakers for community organizations on all aspects of human relations and the humanities. Thirty community leaders attended the telecast "On Common Ground" in October 1996 and then discussed problems and commonalities with twenty members of the DACC faculty, staff, and students.

DACC's Action Plan, which developed from these conversations, involved students in collecting materials from members of minority communities in the Danville area, to be used for curriculum development in DACC's humanities classes and to be available to the local community as well. The project was launched through Rhetoric II classes (the research paper) team-taught with courses in Illinois history (which has a local component), Afro-American literature, and women in literature during the fall 1996 semester. Two Rhetoric II classes piloted the project in Spring 1996. The project so far has involved over seventy-five students who have gathered oral histories from community residents who identify with three minority groups: African American, Latino, and Asian. The students prepared for their interviews with a variety

of "conversations" about diversity: background research, guest speakers, and class discussions. They were also instructed in the techniques of oral history research, with particular attention to the development of sensitivities necessary for non-threatening and still effective interviewing. (The European American instructors found students and guests from minority groups very helpful in this instruction.) The project encouraged students to take charge of their own learning, since they were required to initiate contacts with interviewees, conduct interviews, make transcripts, and evaluate their experiences and information.

The quality of the resulting interviews has varied, but each interview has historical value. Some of the people interviewed were African American community leaders, who have a broad perspective and who told about their leadership in working for equality and opportunity with the community. The interviews provided information about work patterns among minorities and the important roles played by both education and military service in their survival. The interviews with Latinos and Asians were very diverse, but did uncover common themes and common challenges such as language barriers, isolation, job discrimination. Most of the interviews also focused on private lives--how individuals and families maintained their integrity while coping with prejudice and other challenges. Pride in accomplishments was common to all groups, as was a firm belief in education and an intense identification with family. The greatest challenge to students and instructors in this project was to find enough people willing to

be interviewed. Sometimes people would agree, but cancel appointments. Few attended the special night for interviews scheduled at the college, an effort to find a neutral ground for those hesitant to be interviewed at home. Some students withdrew from Rhetoric, finding the project to be more of a challenge than they could handle. Those who remained and found interviewees, however, were enriched by the opportunity. In their evaluations they stated that they had gained a new awareness of minorities, a new appreciation for community diversity, and pride in their own abilities to meet new challenges.

The climax of the fall semester project was an activity which we added to our original action plan after meeting with our mentor, Max Reichard, in Los Angeles, and with guest speakers there. Encouraged by their question: "What will the people interviewed get for their efforts?" we honored those who gave interviews with a celebration. Entitled "E Pluribus Unum," the festive event on a Tuesday evening in November featured displays of pictures and quotes from the interviews (arranged under common themes such as work, recreation, family, and education). The evening was a great success, attended by about one hundred participants. Students made their interviewees welcome and all enjoyed looking at the displays and enjoying a variety of ethnic foods and music, including a Latino band and dancing, an African drumming group, and a gospel trio.

We still need to complete corrections on the interviews collected so far (each interviewee has a chance to correct the transcript) and to establish the most effective way to make the materials accessible at college and community libraries and

museums. This will be done with learning resource professionals as our consultants. We expect liberal arts instructors to addthe materials to curricula in social science and humanities courses at DACC, so the material must be made usable for them. We are also expecting instructors to extend the project to spring 1997 courses, so will share our instructional materials and experiences with them. Also due this spring is a special, expanded issue of "Waiting for Rain," the college literary magazine, which will feature student writings and other material centered on the minority ethnic experience in the Danville area.

The display for "E Pluribus Unum" included pictures and quotations which highlight both the minority experience and the commonalities which all of us share as Americans, and we will use this material in displays for Black History Month, Women's History Month, and Latino History Month. Students and community members were impressed by the commonalities in the displayed quotes and pictures: a deep belief in the value of education, an intense identification with family, and a pride in accomplishment. A common theme, voiced by an immigrant from Korea, was that "I came to the United States looking for the 'American Dream' just like everybody else." Interviewees were forthright about the challenges of prejudice, but a Latino woman expressed another common theme about people: "To me I see them the same; no matter they're white, or green, or purple, they are human beings." We believe that our project at DACC took our community and college a few steps further towards her outlook.